

Tompkins County Legislature
Minutes
Public Hearing
November 4, 2009

Public Hearing – Tentative 2010 Tompkins County Budget and the 2010-2014 Tompkins County Capital Program

Chair Koplinka-Loehr called the public hearing to order at 7:00 p.m. concerning the Tentative 2010 Tompkins County Budget and the 2010-2014 Tompkins County Capital Program and asked if anyone wished to speak.

Amy Wood Gonzalez, President of the Ithaca Board of Realtors, read and submitted the following statement:

”My name is Amy Wood Gonzalez and I am the President of the Ithaca Board of Realtors. I speak today in opposition of two of your proposed tax increases in the amended budget.

“On the national and state level, there are several efforts being made to stimulate the housing market with the first time homebuyer tax credit and other incentives. The housing market has a major and direct effect on the economy. We strive to encourage home ownership here in Tompkins County.

“Tompkins County already increased the burden on home SELLERS in 2006, when they increased the transfer tax from \$4 per thousand to \$6 per thousand. Now there is a proposal for an additional tax on the BUYERS by increasing the mortgage recording tax by ¼%. This will add an additional burden to those seeking a mortgage to purchase a home, whether it is their first home, second or an income property. In addition, those individuals that are re-financing their current home will be affected by this proposed increase.

“The proposed 3.97% increase in property taxes will affect all home owners in the County. From a housing and tax perspective, Tompkins County already suffers from being one of the most expensive counties in Upstate New York. In fact, in a 2008 study ranking property taxes on owner occupied housing as a percentage of home value, Tompkins County ranked the 25th highest in the Country! We don’t want to see even more people priced out of the local housing market and forced to move out of the county.

“We understand that this is a difficult year for everyone and that the budget process and financial decisions are very difficult for the Legislature. We appreciate the work that has been done. However, we strongly urge you to reconsider these two proposed tax increases that directly impact our future and current property owners. Thank you.”

Gerard Cox, Ithaca, spoke in support of the Public Library. He said he uses the Library for many different things including borrowing books, magazines, DVDs, etc. and although he does not use the computers, there are a number of people who do. However, he is finding the current situation frustrating, as there are delays in having books and other items returned to shelves in a timely manner due to budget cuts and the shortage of staff. He urged the Legislature to find any money it can to allocate to the Library. He said he would also like to see the Library open everyday of the week including Sunday hours, which have been a great success. He closed his comments by stating the Library is a terrific place in Ithaca and that he often will take out-of-town visitors to see it.

Mike Lane, Village of Dryden, spoke about the increase in the Mortgage Recording Tax. He commented this issue was debated a few years ago when the Transfer Tax was considered and approved. He said there are no other counties around that have both taxes and urged the Legislature to consider changing one or the other.

Kathy Schlather, Executive Director of the Human Services Coalition, spoke about the \$10,000 over-target request that was approved as an amendment to the tentative budget and then removed. It was a positive message and a small encouragement to the agencies and when it was removed, it was demoralizing to the agencies.

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Susan Currie, newly appointed Director of the Tompkins County Public Library, introduced herself and commented that at 10 a.m. when the doors are unlocked, there is a rush of people that come in to the Library.

No one else wished to speak, and the public hearing was closed at 7:14 p.m.